

## A MYSTERY

It Was Explained With a Happy Denouement

By F. A. MITCHEL

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I prefer the autumn for automobil- ing. The country is then beautiful, and I am comparatively free from the dust of other autos. In these rides I love to commune with nature and usually go alone.

One October I was riding through the beautiful hills of Vermont when evening came upon me in a thin, settled region, and I encountered a breakdown at the same time. I couldn't, like Joshua, turn the sun back in his course, and I saw at a glance that I couldn't repair the break in my auto. Fortunately near me was a house. It was a queer looking structure built of brick and hexagonal in form. Leaving my auto beside the road where it was stalled, with a light before and behind, I went to the house resolved if admitted to spend the night there. There was not much encouragement of a welcome for me since it was now quite dark and not a light was to be seen at a single window.

On reaching the premises I went to the front door and beat on it with the old fashioned brass lion's head knocker. I failed to rouse any one. Then I went around the house, looking for a possible entrance. I found one through a window the sash of which had been left unlocked. Entering, I struck a match and saw that I was in a house furnished in colonial style. Not a bed or bureau could have been less than a hundred years old. It was evidently the home when occupied of refined and educated people.

Going upstairs, I found a bedroom that suited me, with a four post bedstead and a broad open fireplace. A wood box stood beside the latter, and I soon had half a dozen logs burning brightly. Then, returning to my auto, I took my lunch basket, which I always carried in case of necessity, containing both meat and drink, and returned. There were lamps in the house and dishes, but no eatables. I took of the dishes what few I needed, went upstairs, pulled a small table to the fire and ate my supper, washing it down with a pint of wine.

I had been riding in the wind all day and was very sleepy. Instead of getting into the bed, on which there was a sheet and pillowcase, I fell asleep in my chair. I don't know how long I slept, but when I awoke the fire gave out only the glow of coals. Remembering that I was alone in a deserted house, I instinctively looked about me to make sure that I was perfectly safe. On a wooden partition separating the room from another hung an unframed print, the head and shoulders of a young girl, life size. There was something about the eyes that arrested my attention. By the imperfect light they seemed strange. In fact, they looked like human eyes inserted in a paper picture. I am not superstitious or nervous, but the uncanny effect started me. Throwing some light wood on the fire, I started a blaze, but when it came and I looked again at the picture the eyes were merely printed. I got up from my seat, went to them and, seeing that they were paper, threw off my outer garments, lay down on the bed and went to sleep.

The next morning I was awakened by hearing a sound as though something had been set down outside my door. Remembering the eyes on the picture, I was somewhat curious at any happening. Getting up, I went to the door, opened it, and there at my feet was a pitcher of hot water.

My mind went back at once to the fairy tales of my boyhood. I was surely in the house of a magician, and I hoped that the "princess" was there too. Performing my ablutions, I put on my clothes and, opening the door, went downstairs. The first room I struck was the dining room, and what was my astonishment to find the table set for breakfast, with but one plate.

"Hello, fairy!" I called jocularly—that is, I tried to call jocularly, but failed, and when the wall gave back no sound but that of my own voice I confess I felt a very uncanny sensation. Had I suffered some sudden brain trouble?

I was rattled. The eyes I had seen the night before, the pitcher of hot water, the breakfast table set with dishes only—had completely upset me. I determined to explore the house and bolted right into the kitchen. I found no one, but a fire was lighted in the stove, and on it coffee was spouting up in a percolator. I went into all the other rooms on the ground floor and, finding no one, mounted the stairs to explore the upper stories. There was no one in any room. In the garret I found a locked door and couldn't effect an entrance, but it seemed to me that it was a storeroom. I returned to the room I had slept in. My heart was beating like a kettledrum. I pooh-poohed and tried to laugh at the oddity of the situation, but it was no use. I sat down in the chair in which I had slept the night before and tried to reassure myself that I was mentally sound. I don't remember how long I was in my room—perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes—when I heard a tap at the door and a sweet voice say:

"Breakfast is ready."

I made a dash for the door, opened it and looked—anywhere, everywhere. Not a sign of life!

But the odor of coffee, fresh made toast and broiled meat reassured me. I went down again into the dining room, and there on the breakfast table were breakfast, fried potatoes, eggs—in

short, a fine breakfast. I looked into the kitchen; there was no one there. I sat down to the table, poured out a cup of coffee, helped myself to the viands and ate my breakfast.

The first sip of coffee, the first mouthful of food, bracing me, as it did, made me feel more confident that I was not in a condition to be transferred to bedlam and by the time I had finished my breakfast I felt sure there was some explanation of the mystery on other grounds than that I had lost my reason. "And yet," I argued, relapsing into doubt, "insane persons believe themselves of perfectly sound mind."

I arose from the table, went into a sitting room in the front of the house and looked out through a window. There was my auto standing beside the road just as I had left it the night before. The morning was bright, and I would have liked to lay a plan for its mending and a possible getting away, but would not do so on any account before having solved the mystery. I sat down in the sunshine, lit a cigar and began to plan—not the repairing of my auto, but a method of finding out whence came the attention I was receiving in this apparently unoccupied house.

I finally concluded that the only way to draw out the mysterious somebody who was ministering to my wants was to entrap him or her into a fancied security. I resolved to pretend to sleep. Taking up a book I found on a table, I began to read, nodding and starting up alternately till finally, as if overpowered by slumber, I began to breathe heavily and then to snore.

It wasn't long before I heard whispering in the hall without. Then after a dead silence between my partly closed eyelids I saw a face peering through the doorway, which was but half open. It was the face of a girl. It was withdrawn, and the face of another girl appeared. Three of them in succession surveyed me with evident interest and satisfaction, to say nothing of merriment.

"Oh!" I exclaimed mentally. "Where's mischief in the wind. Trust a girl for deviltry and three girls for three times as much of it as one. I have evidently fallen into the toils of a bevy of them, and they are having great fun at my expense."

I didn't bother myself as to how these girls came to be there. I contented myself with waiting and watching through my half closed eyes. A door behind me was opened, and presently I felt a tickling on the back of my neck. I knew at once that one of these girls was teasing me with a feather. I made a frantic grasp for what was intended for a bug, but snored on. The bug lit on my cheek—another frantic clutch and another, my efforts to catch the insect becoming more and more ludicrous.

At last I heard snatched laughter. It is a law of nature that the more successful we are the more venture some we become. Women who are most timid in beginning to take risks eventually become the most reckless plungers. Being young and fond of adventure, I was delighted with the turn the affair had taken. The more venturesome the girls the sounder I slept, the louder I snored. Then a girl tiptoed into the room and when I moved scurried out. Another, emboldened by the success of the first, did the same thing. Then I heard a whispering, catching but a few words—"Dare you to kiss him."

"Well, now," I remarked to myself, "this is getting interesting." And I snored loud enough to wake the dead. Then one of the girls—wasn't she pretty, though!—stole into the room, every fiber under quick control, the spirit of daredevil in her eyes, advanced, retreated, advanced again. I never slept so quietly in my life, though my heart was beating like a triphammer. Then she tiptoed around beside me, bent over me, straightened up, bent again, lowered her face to mine and lightly touched my lips with hers.

There was a frightful shriek as I unfolded her tightly within my two arms and a whole chorus from those without. I raised kisses on her cheeks and on her lips. "Thanks for the night's lodging," I said, giving her a smack on her right cheek. "And this is for the hot water at my room, this for the breakfast." And so I expressed my gratitude for everything I had received and many things I hadn't received.

Well, the climax had come and passed. Every one came forward, and the oldest girl gave me an explanation. The house belonged to the father of one of them, who had inherited it from his great-grandfather and always kept it exactly as he had received it. In summer it was used by the family for a country residence. The night of my arrival the daughter of the owner had brought a party of her girl friends with provisions for spending a week end. They had found signs of some one within and finally ventured inside themselves, surveying me through the eyes of the picture which had been turned into peepholes for a former purpose. Then it had occurred to them to have their amusement in mystifying me.

Some young men—and a chaperon, of course—were expected during the day, and I was invited to make one of the party. I accepted and had the time of my life. I have since been there often and am extravagantly fond of the place. There is good reason for this. I met my wife there, gave her my first kiss there, courted her there and married her in the very room in which I kissed her.

Golf Maniac (to a fellow-traveler)—And pray, sir, what may your favorite recreation be?

Hypochondriac—Indigestion, —Punch.

"Why do you hate him so?" "He has been knocking me to the ground."

"What did he tell her?" "That my salary is."—Houston Post.

The Evening Sun—10c a Week.

## TO SAGE OF THE GOOSEBONE

WEATHER SIGNS ARE PROVING A BIG PUZZLE.

One Blames the Comet—Squirrels and Groundhog Tip Off Proboscations.

NATURE PROPHETS DISAGREE.

Channahon, Ill., Dec. 15.—The local nature prophets can't quite agree on what is coming off this winter in the way of weather. There is much conflicting evidence for believers in the goose bone, the ground hog, the wrinkled tomato, the thick corn husk and other signs supposed to give a correct forecast to consider that at a gathering of the prophets here no final forecast was risked.

One prophet had the courage to rise up and state that he had been in the habit of basing his prediction for the winter on what the weather was each Sept. 29, but that last year all signs failed, due, he thinks, to the disconcerting advent of Halley's comet then approaching the earth. At the finish, he had a choice lot of unfulfilled forecasts on hand.

Following this abject confession of prophecies that failed, another member of the convention announced that he planned his faith to the appearance of tomatoes. Each autumn he digs up a tomato vine and hangs it in the cellar. After giving the tomatoes on the vine two weeks in which to line up as weather prophets, he examines them. If they are soft and wrinkled the winter will be mild. This year's test found them in that condition.

The consensus of opinion among those who have faith in worms as weather prophets is that the winter will be mild because worms are to be seen everywhere, and if it was to be a cold winter the worms would be in their steamheated flats or some other comfortable home by this time.

Some new work in crude meteorology was introduced at the convention by making the groundhog do a semi-annual instead of an annual stunt. Heretofore his appearance on Feb. 2 has been the only time in the year when the little animal had the center of the stage, but they said at this meeting the little groundhog is just as reliable in the fall as he is in February.

On Candlemas day he is supposed to come out at noon, look for his shadow and go back, if he can see it, for six weeks annex to his winter's nap. In the fall what he thinks about prospects for the winter are based on the approaches of his home. Every groundhog with any pretension to class has two entrances to his domicile. One of these faces the north and the other the south. As signs are observed he closes one entrance, and this year, according to those who had wandered about the woods along the Des Plaines river, the northern entrance was closed, an indication that the groundhog expects a cold winter.

To offset this, another delegate reported seeing a turtle and two black snakes wandering about as if they thought it was May instead of November. This he insisted, was a sure sign that the winter is to be mild.

Squirrels are depended upon by many for a tip on the winter. This year the squirrels have laid in a very small supply of nuts for the winter. According to those who back the squirrel is an authority, this means that the ground is to be bare and the weather mild.

"These little fellows," said a dele-

## Feet So Sore Couldn't Walk Down Stairs

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gate from Mazon creek, "make no mistakes. They are firm believers in the maxim, 'While you're gettin', git a plenty.' At the same time they are packing a lot of stuff into their houses that will not be needed and which will have to be thrown out in the spring.

The moss on the trees was reported by another delegate to show conclusively that a hard winter is coming. "Go out in the woods," said the moss man, "and look at the trees. On the north side of them you will find a heavy growth of moss. That's nature's protection for the trees and a sure sign of a hard winter."

Among all the varying signs the goosebone is still the most credited one. When the breast bone of a young goose shows black spots it is conceded that the winter is to be severe. The convention would have made a definite forecast on the goose bone basis had it not been that two of these breastbones were exhibited, one of them discolored with dark spots while the other was clear.

TAKE CARE! Remember that when your kidneys are affected, your life is in danger. M. Mayer, Rochester, N. Y., says: "My trouble started with a sharp shooting pain over my back which grew worse daily. I felt sluggish and tired, my kidney action was irregular and infrequent. I started using Foley Kidney Pills. Each dose seemed to put new life and strength into me, and now I am completely cured and feel better and stronger than for years. Gilbert's drug store.

Christmas North and South. Washington celebrates Christmas in the northern style, a la New England—that is to say, by simply closing the stores and keeping quiet—but Alexandria, Va., celebrates in good old southern style, with rockers, roman candles, firecrackers, torpedoes, noise and general rejoicing hilarity.

Northern people often wonder why it is that the southerners celebrate Christmas like the Fourth of July and the latter holiday like Christmas, but the reason is not far to seek. The southern Christmas is the Christmas of old Merrie England, Germany and France before the reformation. According to the view of all good orthodox Christians of that period, the birth of Christ was an event such as to cause delight and general rejoicing among men, and consequently they celebrated the Lord's birthday with the proper demonstrations of rejoicing. The Puritans were inclined to frown down religion of this sort, so that when America was settled by Cavalier and Puritan each celebrated the day in his own way.—Washington Post.

Christmas Candle and Tree. The old custom of the lighting of the Christmas candle, which is still observed by the Irish peasantry, chiefly at Candlemas or Old Christmas day, has become quite obsolete in England. A relic of the observance in England is, however, preserved. An old stone socket carved with a lamb is shown in the buttery of St. John's college, Oxford, which was used in former days for holding the Christmas candle. The Christmas tree was practically unknown in England a little more than half a century ago. It was introduced into this country from Germany, where the Christmas tree has been a popular feature of Christmas eve festivities for centuries, by the prince consort shortly after his marriage.—Westminster Gazette.

"How do you know when your husband forgets to mail the letters you give him?"

"I always put a card addressed to myself among 'em; if I don't get it the next day I know. And it only costs a cent."—Cleveland Leader.

How a man does admire the people who let out a laugh at his jokes.

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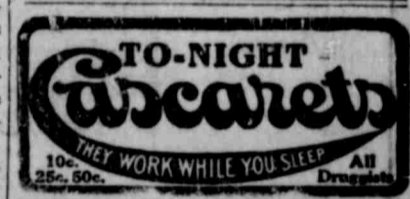
## First Christmas Observance.

Christmas gets its name from the mass celebrated in the early days of the Christian church in honor of the birth of Christ, its first solemnization having been ordered by Pope Telesphorus. This was in or before the year 138; for in that year Pope Telesphorus died.

At first Christmas was what is known as a movable feast, just as Easter is now, and owing to misunderstandings was celebrated as late as April or May. In the fourth century an ecclesiastical investigation was ordered, and upon the authority of the tables of the censurers in the Roman archives Dec. 25 was agreed upon as the dates of the Saviour's nativity. Tradition fixed

the hour of birth at about midnight, and this led to the celebration of a midnight mass in all the churches, a second at dawn and a third in the later morning.

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